



# Students' Perceptions of Plagiarism Policy in Higher Education: a Comparison of the United Kingdom, Czechia, Poland and Romania

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## Abstract

Students' attitudes towards plagiarism and academic misconduct have been found to vary across national cultures, although the relationship between national culture and students' perceptions of plagiarism policy remains unexplored. Student survey data ( $n = 1757$ ) from the UK, Czechia, Poland and Romania were analysed for differences in students' perceptions of three specific aspects of plagiarism policy – access, support and detail – at their respective universities. Considered through the lens of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the study found significant differences between the UK and the three Eastern European countries for all measures except students' awareness of the penalties applied for plagiarism. Low 'power distance' and high 'individualism' were related to positive perceptions of plagiarism policy and process. The findings suggest that institutional plagiarism policy and procedures need to be responsive to the unique characteristics of national cultural context.

**Keywords** Academic integrity · Plagiarism · Policy · Survey · Cross-cultural theory

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## Introduction

Plagiarism or ‘the use of others’ words, ideas, or creative work without appropriate acknowledgement’ (Bretag 2013) is a ubiquitous academic integrity issue in higher education (Fusch et al. 2017; Heckler and Forde 2015; Ison 2018; James et al. 2017). Research on academic integrity has been framed largely in the context of ‘cheating’ and ‘misconduct’ by students (Bowers 1964; Brimble and Stevenson-Clarke 2005; McCabe and Trevino 1996; McCabe et al. 2001). Large student surveys seeking to quantify the prevalence of cheating have been conducted mainly in the United States of America and Canada (Christensen-Hughes and McCabe 2006; McCabe and Bowers 1994; McCabe 2005) with smaller studies in Australia (Brimble and Stevenson-Clarke 2005; Kidwell and Kent 2008; Marsden et al. 2005). More recently a large Australian study investigated students’ engagement in ‘contract cheating’ or the outsourcing of assessments to third parties (Bretag et al. 2018).

Although most of the research on student cheating has been conducted in Western cultures, students’ attitudes have been found to vary across national cultures with respect to plagiarism (Hu and Lei 2014; Ehrich et al. 2014) and academic dishonesty (Yukhymenko-Lescroart 2014). A study comparing the attitudes of Ukrainian and American students towards cheating behaviours found large differences and concluded that Ukrainian students viewed cheating behaviours to be less wrong, in part due to entrenched corruption in the country (Stephens et al. 2010). Ukraine is not unique in Eastern Europe with Baždarić et al. (2012) finding that students from post-communist countries have a more tolerant attitude towards cheating. Research on academic integrity in South-East Europe (Glendenning et al. 2018) reported similar findings, with students in one focus group stating that “Cheating is in our blood”. The Dissernet Project (Rostovstev 2017) revealed that Russian academics had published thousands of papers which contained various forms of academic misconduct, including plagiarism. Corruption is undoubtedly a challenge to academic integrity in the region, with Eastern Europe perceived to be more corrupt than other nations in Western Europe, such as the UK (Transparency International 2017).

Researchers advocate a whole-of-institution and holistic approach to address plagiarism (Devlin 2006; Macdonald and Carroll 2006; Palmer et al. 2018), along with strategies to minimise plagiarism through course and assessment design (James et al. 2002; Carroll 2007), the use of text matching software for both education and detection (Bretag and Mahmud 2009; Davis and Carroll 2009; Graham-Matheson and Starr 2013) and the provision of academic literacies and anti-plagiarism training (Harris 2001; Palmer et al. 2018). There has been growing support for promoting a culture of academic integrity (Bertram Gallant and Kalichman 2011; Bretag et al. 2011; McCabe et al. 2001; Waangard and Stephens 2011), to ensure that students have a strong ‘sense of personal responsibility for academic integrity’ (Stephens 2017). This has resulted in a shift away from research which quantifies the prevalence of cheating, to exploring how students understand their responsibilities to act with integrity in the context of their own institution’s policy (Adam et al. 2016; Bretag et al. 2014; Glendenning et al. 2013; Gullifer and Tyson 2014).

An Australian study based on an online survey of university students ( $n = 15,304$ ) identified *access*, *support* and *detail* as the three core elements of academic integrity policy ‘most relevant to students’ (Bretag et al. 2014). *Access* in exemplary academic integrity policy is where ‘the policy is easy to locate and read; it is concise and comprehensible’; *support* is where ‘there are proactive and embedded systems to enable implementation of the policy’ and *detail* is where ‘there is extensive but not excessive description of breaches, outcomes and

processes' (see Bretag et al. 2011 for a full explication of these elements of policy). *Detail* is particularly important so that all stakeholders have a shared understanding of institutional requirements, thus ensuring consistent implementation of the policy.

To address the limited research on academic integrity policy (most often referred to as 'plagiarism policy') in higher education institutions in Europe, the *Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe* (IPPHEAE) project surveyed students' understandings of plagiarism policies in 27 European countries ( $n = 3980$ ) (Glendinning et al. 2013; Glendinning 2014). Our study compares IPPHEAE data from the United Kingdom (UK), and three nations in Eastern Europe (Czechia, Poland and Romania) on students' perceptions of access, support and detail of plagiarism policy at their universities, using insights from cross-cultural management theory.

The next section of this paper discusses the conceptualisation and operationalisation of culture in management literature. The relationship between Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions and students' perceptions of plagiarism policy are then empirically investigated. Finally, we discuss our findings and implications for higher education management and research.

## Conceptualising 'Culture'

The role of culture has provided a popular lens through which to conduct organisational research since the 1980s. Corporate values and rituals have been referred to as 'culture' (Deal and Kennedy 1982; Peters and Waterman 1982) which has 'muddied the waters' (Schein 1990) in terms of developing an accepted definition. One of the earliest models of culture from anthropological studies is based on value orientations in society (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961). Schein (1990) identified three fundamental levels a culture manifests itself by – observable artefacts, values and basic underlying assumptions. Schein argues that the 'accumulated shared learning', 'basic-taken-for granted-assumptions' and 'solutions that have worked well enough to be considered as valid' are central to the concept of culture (Schein and Scheiner 2016, p.6). Trompenaars concurred with Schein's conceptualisation of culture and defined culture as 'the way in which people solve problems' (1993, p.6). Hofstede (2001, p.9) similarly defined culture as 'collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category from another'. In Hofstede's framework (2001, p.12) societal norms, underpinned by the value systems of major groups in the population, impact on the structure and functioning of institutions, including educational systems.

## Dimensions of Culture

Cross-cultural management studies suggest that national cultures impact work behaviour and organisational functioning (Hofstede 2001; Smith et al. 2002; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 2011;). National culture has been operationalised by numerous theorists (Hofstede 1980; Schwartz 1999; Trompenaars 1993; House et al. 2004) via the measurement of 'dimensions'.

Hofstede conceptualised national cultures as comprised of five dimensions, including power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity and long-term/short term orientation (Hofstede 1997, 2001). *Power distance* is defined as 'the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a

country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally’ (Hofstede 2001, p. 98). National cultures with low power distance are characterised by flatter organisational structures and more direct lines of communication. *Uncertainty avoidance* is defined as ‘the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations’ (Hofstede 2001, p. 161). Institutions in national cultures with high uncertainty avoidance tend to be more rigid with strong structure and rules. *Individualism* is defined as ‘a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him/herself and her/his immediate family only’ while *Collectivism* ‘stands for a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede 2001, p.225). *Masculinity/femininity*, originally referred to the division of emotional roles between men and women, but more recent literature (An and Kim 2007; Barry 2015) refers to this as a societal preference for achievement and hence this dimension is sometimes referred to as ‘achievement orientation’; *Long-term/short-term orientation* refers to the choice of focus for people’s efforts: the future or the present (Hofstede 2001, p. 29).

Trompenaars (1993, p.29) identified five dimensions of national culture based on value orientations that influence behaviour: Universalism versus particularism (rules versus relationships); Collectivism versus individualism (the group versus the individual); Neutral versus emotional (the range of feelings expressed); Diffuse versus specific (the range of involvement); and Achievement versus ascription (how status is accorded). Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2011) sought to uncover the value systems of managers across the world by their responses to specific dilemmas. Other large studies of national cultures include the GLOBE study (House et al. 2004) which focused on leadership style in organisations, identified nine dimensions of cultures including Hofstede’s dimensions of power distance and uncertainty avoidance.

Hofstede’s national scores for the cultural dimensions of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity are compared in Table 1 for the national cultures represented in this study – the UK, Czechia, Poland and Romania. Comparison on the fifth dimension of long-term orientation was not included here as comparable data from the original Hofstede study was unavailable for Romania. The first four dimensions were based on Hofstede’s original study with IBM managers as respondents while the fifth dimension of long-term orientation was based on a later study of Chinese students (Minkov and Hofstede 2012).

As Table 1 shows, the UK has a much lower score for power distance (35) as compared to the score for Eastern European countries (57–90). Furthermore, the UK has a higher score for individualism (89) as compared to the range for Eastern Europe (30–60). In Eastern Europe, cultures tend to share a communist history with its emphasis on the collective group

**Table 1** Dimensions of Culture – Comparison of UK, Czechia, Poland and Romania\*

Cultural Dimension	UK	Czechia	Poland	Romania
Power Distance	35	57	68	90
Uncertainty Avoidance	35	74	93	90
Individualism	89	58	60	30
Masculinity	66	57	64	42

Source: Hofstede (2001, pp.500–502)

\*Score expressed on a 0–100-point scale

rather than the individual. In terms of uncertainty avoidance, the UK has a much lower score (35) in comparison with the three Eastern European countries (74–93). The dimension of masculinity is less useful as a point of comparison, because all four countries score in the mid-range. Interestingly, Trompenaars study had also found a discernible difference between the UK and the three Eastern European countries in the dimension of 'achievement vs ascription' which is conceptually close to 'power distance' (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 2011, p.172).

Hofstede's dimensions are the most widely accepted framework to compare national cultures in management (Beugelsdijk et al. 2015; Venaik et al. 2013) and marketing (Soares et al. 2007; Steenkamp 2001). We acknowledge that some researchers are critical of Hofstede's work (Baskerville 2003; McSweeney 2002; Schmitz and Weber 2014) while others (Brewer and Venaik 2012; Mooij 2013) question the application of national level constructs for individual level analysis. However, recent studies using Hofstede's dimensions have found that national culture influence configuration of financial systems (Lavezzolo et al. 2018), informal learning (Kim and Mclean 2014), attitudes towards safety (Noort et al. 2016), adoption of technology (Tam and Oliveira 2018; Zhang et al. 2018), and perception of project risk (Liu et al. 2015).

## Relationship between Dimensions of Culture and Students' Perceptions of Plagiarism Policy

For this study, Hofstede's cultural dimensions of power distance, individualism and uncertainty avoidance were considered as most relevant in exploring the influence of national culture on students' perceptions of plagiarism policy. Masculinity ('achievement orientation') did not provide a useful point of comparison, and data for long-term orientation was not available for Romania in Hofstede's original research.

Universities in cultures with *low power distance* might be expected to have plagiarism policy more readily available and clearly communicated to students to allow them access to policy that affects their academic life. Students would presumably be more open to approaching their teachers and university management to make enquiries about academic matters. Students in national cultures with lower power distance such as the UK would be more likely to perceive a higher level of access to plagiarism policy and procedures.

Students in more *individualistic* cultures such as the UK, might also be expected to consider academic integrity to be an individual responsibility, whereas students in the more *collectivistic* East European nations might consider this to be a university community responsibility. Teodorescu and Andrei (2009) found that there is a 'general passivity' among Romanian higher education students regarding academic integrity. Students are not only reluctant to report other students who cheat during exams or faculty who behaviour unethically, many do not regard this to be their responsibility.

National cultures with *high uncertainty avoidance* scores have 'an emotional need for rules (even if the rules never seem to work)' (Hofstede n.d.). It might therefore be expected that the Eastern European universities would have a much stronger focus on inculcating students to a strict code of behaviour and rigid set of regulations around academic integrity, to ameliorate perceptions of endemic corruption (see for example, Glendinning et al. 2018).

Based on the literature, and using the three dimensions of national culture conceptualised by Hofstede (2001) – power distance, individualism and uncertainty avoidance – the hypotheses for this study are:

Hypothesis 1: In national cultures with lower power distance, students will be more likely to perceive that they have access to plagiarism policy.

Hypothesis 2: In national cultures with higher levels of individualism, students' will be more likely to perceive that they have adequate support to avoid plagiarism.

Hypothesis 3: In national cultures with higher levels of uncertainty avoidance, students' will be more likely to perceive that there is a consistent implementation of plagiarism policy.

## Method

### Sample

Data for the IPPHEAE study ( $n = 3980$ ) was collected in 27 European Union (EU) countries from 2010 to 2013 and included online surveys of students, teachers and senior managers. Online survey respondents were recruited at each institution on a voluntary and anonymous basis. This paper is limited to student survey data from four nations ( $n = 1757$ ) that participated in the IPPHEAE study – the UK ( $n = 343$ ), Czechia ( $n = 351$ ), Poland ( $n = 633$ ), and Romania ( $n = 430$ ). A criterion for selecting nations for this study was that the number of respondents from each country exceeded 250 ( $n > 250$ ). This was done to increase the rigour of the statistical analysis (Schonbrodt and Perugini 2013; Fraley and Vazire 2014). The four nations accounted for a majority (44%) of the respondents in the IPPHEAE study. The two other countries in the IPPHEAE study with more than 250 student respondents were Austria ( $n = 543$ ) and Cyprus ( $n = 323$ ); however, these two countries did not meet the second criterion for selection in this study i.e. similar national culture. Czechia, Poland and Romania – were selected for the similarity of their national cultures as 'Eastern Europe' and would therefore provide useful comparison with an 'Anglo' culture such as the UK (Ronen and Shankar 2013). Eastern Europe has a shared history and the perception is that corruption is higher in these countries as compared to the UK (Transparency International 2017).

The demographic profile of the survey respondents across the four nations (see Table 2) had a majority of respondents (60–75%) aged 21–25 years and studying full time (85–98%). The level of study varied across the nations with a majority of students in Poland and Romania (60–72%) enrolled in a bachelor degree while in the UK and Czechia this was the case for a minority of students (42–44%).

The sample from the UK and Czechia had a larger number of participating universities ( $n = 9$  and  $n = 14$  respectively) as compared to Romania and Poland ( $n = 4$  and  $n = 2$  respectively).

### Survey Instrument

The English version of the survey was designed by the IPPHEAE project team together with project advisors and refined following a pilot study and focus group in the UK. Pilot studies were then conducted in the other main project partner countries using different language translations of the original survey. The survey was translated into 14 languages across the EU

**Table 2** Demographic profile of survey respondents by nation

	UK (%)	Czechia (%)	Poland (%)	Romania (%)
Age Group				
20 or under	22.7	15.1	17.5	17.2
21–25	60.3	63.5	68.7	75.6
Level of study				
Bachelor	42.1	44.6	60.3	72.4
Masters	57.0	48.1	38.3	27.3
Study load				
Full-time	98.1	85.4	87.0	96.4
Part-time	1.9	14.6	13.0	3.6

Source: IPPHEAE survey data

Note: Czechia had 7.3% of respondents enrolled in a doctoral degree program

including Czech, Polish and Romanian. Validity of the survey instrument was strengthened in the design phase by including the use of multiple pilot studies. Reliability was built into the survey by using an identical online survey instrument across all participating countries (Glendinning et al. 2013). This allowed all participants to complete the survey in their first language. The English version of the IPPHEAE survey instrument is available from the project website (<http://plagiarism.cz/ippheae/>). Students responded to closed questions relating to awareness of plagiarism, awareness and satisfaction with institutional policies and procedures for plagiarism/academic dishonesty, and penalties for misconduct at their university. The survey had one open-ended question asking respondents for suggestions for reducing plagiarism at their institution.

## Data Analysis

To measure students' perceptions of plagiarism/academic dishonesty policy and procedures at their university, 11 items were selected from the IPPHEAE survey instrument for the current study. The items selected corresponded with the core elements of exemplary academic integrity policy (access, support and detail) considered to be relevant to students (see Bretag et al. 2011, 2014). Responses to survey questions were measured on a 5-point Likert response format from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree'.

Statements relating to 'Access to policy' (Access) were:

- (1) The institution where I now study has policies and procedures for dealing with plagiarism
- (2) The institution where I now study has policies and procedures for dealing with academic dishonesty
- (3) Plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to students
- (4) I know what penalties are applied to students for different forms of plagiarism and academic dishonesty

Statements relating to 'Adequacy of support' (Support) were:

- (1) I have received training in techniques for scholarly academic writing and anti-plagiarism issues
- (2) I would like to have more training on avoidance of plagiarism and academic dishonesty
- (3) I understand the links between copyright, Intellectual property rights and plagiarism

Statements relating to ‘Detail ensuring consistency in implementation of policy’ (Detail) were:

- (1) Penalties for plagiarism are administered according to a standard formula
- (2) I believe that all teachers follow the same procedures for similar cases of plagiarism
- (3) I believe that the way teachers treat plagiarism does not vary from student to student
- (4) I believe that when dealing with plagiarism teachers follow the existing procedures

Results from the survey data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 24). Descriptive statistics including frequencies, cross-tabulations and correlations were used. Demographic variables considered in this study included age, level of study and study load. As the response data was an ordinal variable type that is an ‘unstandardized discrete variable with ordered categories’ (Kampen and Swyngedouw 2000, p.99), non-parametric tests were selected for comparing student responses for the 11 Likert response format items across the four national cultures (identified by country). Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted with post hoc test using Dunn test adjusted for Bonferroni correction for all significant differences.

The 11 Likert response format items were combined to measure overall student perceptions of plagiarism policy and procedures. Reliability analysis was conducted for the Likert scale of ‘Plagiarism Policy Perception’ with a minimum Cronbach  $\alpha = .70$  as acceptable. As Carifo and Perla (2007, p.111) argue, combining a minimum of seven single Likert response format items into a Likert scale can produce interval data. Likert scale data was therefore analysed using a parametric ANOVA test to compare the variation in nations and demographic variables. Post hoc test using Games-Howell test was conducted for any significant differences, as the data did not meet the standard of homogeneity of variance. Confidence level  $\alpha = .05$  was used for all statistical tests.

## Results

### Access to Policy

Students were asked to respond to three statements to measure their perceptions of access to policy at their university (see Table 3). A very high proportion of students in the UK (83–93%) agreed that they had access to plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties. In Romania and Poland, less than half of the students agreed they have access. In the third Eastern European country, Czechia, most students (52–71%) agreed they had access; however, the proportion was still much lower than students in the UK.

A Kruskal Wallis test revealed a significant difference between the countries on student perceptions of access to policy (see Table 4).

Post-hoc test using Dunn test with Bonferroni correction showed significant differences between the UK and all three Eastern European countries (see Table 5) for three measures of access – awareness of plagiarism policy, awareness of academic dishonesty policy and availability of plagiarism policy and penalties. However, in relation to the students’ knowledge of the penalties applied, the UK was significantly different to Poland.



**Table 3** Students' perceptions of access to policy across nations

Statement	UK (%) agreed*	Czechia (%) agreed	Poland (%) agreed	Romania (%) agreed
The institution where I now study has policies and procedures for dealing with plagiarism	93.3	71.3	43.0	40.9
The institution where I now study has policies and procedures for dealing with academic dishonesty	83.7	58.6	40.0	47.1
Plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to students	83.9	52.0	24.4	45.1
I know what penalties are applied to students for different forms of plagiarism and academic dishonesty	60.8	70.7	31.1	50.3

Source: IPPHEAE survey data

\*Includes responses selected as 'Agree' and 'Strongly agree'

### Adequacy of Support

Students were asked to respond to four statements to measure their perceptions of the adequacy of support to avoid plagiarism at their university. As Table 6 shows, a majority (77%) of students in the UK agreed that they had received training in academic writing and anti-plagiarism, while a minority (40% or less) of students in Eastern Europe agreed. The majority of students in all four countries said that they understood the links between copyright, intellectual property rights and plagiarism, but would like to have more training on avoidance of plagiarism and academic dishonesty.

A Kruskal Wallis test revealed a significant difference between countries on students' perception of the adequacy of support (see Table 7).

Post-hoc test using Dunn test with Bonferroni correction showed significant differences between the UK and all three Eastern European countries for adequacy of support (see Table 8).

**Table 4** Differences in students' perceptions of access to policy across nations

Statement	Kruskal Wallis Test Result	Mean Rank score
The institution where I now study has policies and procedures for dealing with plagiarism	$\chi^2(3) = 362.796,$ $p < 0.001^{**}$	UK = 1265.43 Czechia = 948.36 Poland = 677.93 Romania = 756.83
The institution where I now study has policies and procedures for dealing with academic dishonesty	$\chi^2(3) = 193.607,$ $p < 0.001^{**}$	UK = 1156.53 Czechia = 900.20 Poland = 718.93 Romania = 823.28
Plagiarism policies, procedures and penalties are available to students	$\chi^2(3) = 327.776,$ $p < 0.001^{**}$	UK = 1228.84 Czechia = 899.13 Poland = 648.11 Romania = 885.01
I know what penalties are applied to students for different forms of plagiarism and academic dishonesty	$\chi^2(3) = 233.546,$ $p < 0.001^{**}$	UK = 1000.56 Czechia = 1070.38 Poland = 641.54 Romania = 918.78

Source: IPPHEAE survey data

\*\*Statistically significant result

**Table 5** Post hoc pairwise comparison of students' perceptions of access to policy

Dunn's multiple comparison test	Awareness of plagiarism policy	Awareness of academic dishonesty policy	Availability of policy and penalties	Knowledge of penalties applied
UK vs Czechia	**	**	**	ns
UK vs Poland	**	**	**	**
UK vs Romania	**	**	**	ns
Czechia vs Poland	**	**	**	**
Czechia vs Romania	**	ns	ns	**
Poland vs Romania	ns	*	**	**

*ns* Indicates no statistically significant difference

\* Statistically significant difference ( $p < .05$ )

\*\* Statistically significant difference ( $p < .001$ )

### Detail Ensuring Consistency in Implementation of Policy

Students were asked to respond to four statements to measure their perception of the consistency of implementation of plagiarism policy at their university (as discussed earlier this relates to the core element of 'detail'). The majority of students in the UK agreed with all four items that indicated consistency in implementation of policy (see Table 9). A minority of students in Eastern Europe agreed that policy is implemented consistently at their university across most of the statements. The only exception was the statement regarding teachers following existing procedures, with which the majority of students in Czechia and Romania agreed.

A Kruskal Wallis test revealed a significant difference between countries for students' perceptions of consistency in implementation of plagiarism policy (see Table 10).

Post-hoc testing using Dunn test with Bonferroni correction showed significant differences between the UK and all three Eastern European countries for students' perceptions of consistency in the implementation of plagiarism policy (see Table 11).

### Overall Students' Perceptions of Plagiarism/Academic Dishonesty Policy and Procedures

Of the 11 Likert-type items selected for analysis, deleting 10 items decreased  $\alpha$ . The only item, which increased  $\alpha$  when deleted, was 'I would like to have more training on avoidance of plagiarism and academic dishonesty'. The Plagiarism Policy Perception (PPP) scale was found

**Table 6** Students' perceptions of adequacy of support across nations

Statement	UK (%) agreed*	Czechia (%) agreed	Poland (%) agreed	Romania (%) agreed
I have received training in techniques for scholarly academic writing and anti-plagiarism issues	77.7	26.6	15.4	40.0
I would like to have more training on avoidance of plagiarism and academic dishonesty	58.2	44.4	52.7	86.7
I understand the links between copyright, Intellectual property rights and plagiarism	72.5	85.6	64.3	80.4

Source: IPPHEAE survey data

\*Includes responses selected as 'Agree' and 'Strongly agree'

**Table 7** Differences in students' perception of adequacy of support across nations

Statement	Kruskal Wallis Test Result	Mean Rank score
I have received training in techniques for scholarly academic writing and anti-plagiarism issues	$\chi^2(3) = 492.554, p < 0.001^{**}$	UK = 1243.01 Czechia = 689.36 Poland = 622.10 Romania = 1088.30
I would like to have more training on avoidance of plagiarism and academic dishonesty	$\chi^2(3) = 177.950, p < 0.001^{**}$	UK = 874.09 Czechia = 703.70 Poland = 786.23 Romania = 1119.92
I understand the links between copyright, Intellectual property rights and plagiarism	$\chi^2(3) = 111.006, p < 0.001^{**}$	UK = 847.46 Czechia = 944.15 Poland = 712.10 Romania = 984.16

Source: IPPHEAE survey data

\*\*Statistically significant result

to be highly reliable (10 items;  $\alpha = .79$ ). There was a statistically significant difference between countries determined by one-way ANOVA,  $F(3,1753) = 108.161, p < .001$ . A Games Howell post hoc test indicated that overall student agreement level was significantly higher for the UK ( $M = 3.75, SD = .85$ ) as compared to Czechia ( $M = 3.43, SD = .47$ ), Poland ( $M = 3.06, SD = .54$ ), and Romania ( $M = 3.54, SD = .57$ ).

Pearson correlation between the variable measuring overall perception of plagiarism/academic dishonesty policy and procedures and demographic variables (age group, level of study, and study load) found a significant positive correlation between perception of policy and procedures scale and age group ( $r = .079, p = .001, n = 1757$ ) and with level of study ( $r = .068, p = .005, n = 1757$ ). No statistically significant difference was determined by one-way ANOVA of age group and perception of policy and procedures. A statistically significant difference was determined by one-way ANOVA of level of study and perception of policy and procedures,  $F(2,1680) = 4.852, p = .008$ . A Games Howell post hoc test indicated that overall

**Table 8** Post hoc pairwise comparison of students' perceptions of support

Pairwise comparison	I I have received training in techniques 'for scholarly academic writing and anti- plagiarism	I would like to have more training on avoidance of plagiarism and academic dishonesty	I understand the links between copyright, Intellectual property rights and plagiarism
UK vs Czechia	**	**	*
UK vs Poland	**	*	**
UK vs Romania	*	**	**
Czechia vs Poland	ns	ns	**
Czechia vs Romania	**	**	ns
Poland vs Romania	**	**	**

Source: IPPHEAE survey data

ns Indicates no statistically significant difference

\* Statistically significant difference ( $p < .05$ )

\*\* Statistically significant difference ( $p < .001$ )

**Table 9** Comparison of students' perceptions of policy implementation across nations

Statement	UK (%) agreed*	Czechia (%) agreed	Poland (%) agreed	Romania (%) agreed
Penalties for plagiarism are administered according to a standard formula	66.6	48.7	30.7	39.6
I believe that all teachers follow the same procedures for similar cases of plagiarism	51.4	20.0	17.8	30.6
I believe that the way teachers treat plagiarism does not vary from student to student	59.7	30.7	27.0	47.8
I believe that when dealing with plagiarism teachers follow the existing procedures	72.7	55.9	27.2	56.3

Source: IPPHEAE survey data

\*Includes responses selected as 'Agree' and 'Strongly agree'

student agreement was statistically significantly higher for Masters students ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = .59$ ) as compared to Bachelors students ( $M = 3.36$ ,  $SD = .62$ ).

## Discussion

This study explored the relationship between national culture and students' perceptions regarding access to plagiarism policy, adequacy of support and detail ensuring consistency in implementation at their university. Comparison of student survey data from diverse national cultures: the UK and three Eastern European countries (Czechia, Poland and Romania) found a significant difference for almost all measures. Students in the UK had a significantly more positive perception of plagiarism policy and procedures at their university ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = .85$ ) as compared to students in Eastern Europe. Among the four nations in this study, students in Poland reported the lowest levels of agreement ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = .54$ ).

**Table 10** Differences in students' perceptions of implementation of policy across nations

Statement	Kruskal Wallis test result	Mean rank score
Penalties for plagiarism are administered according to a standard formula	$\chi^2(3) = 116.133, p < 0.001$ **	UK = 1079.60 Czechia = 897.15 Poland = 744.68 Romania = 856.84
I believe that all teachers follow the same procedures for similar cases of plagiarism	$\chi^2(3) = 111.663, p < 0.001$ **	UK = 1084.28 Czechia = 801.89 Poland = 763.53 Romania = 903.07
I believe that the way teachers treat plagiarism does not vary from student to student	$\chi^2(3) = 137.111, p < 0.001$ **	UK = 1100.33 Czechia = 755.20 Poland = 762.78 Romania = 940.05
I believe that when dealing with plagiarism teachers follow the existing procedures	$\chi^2(3) = 200.200, p < 0.001$ **	UK = 1105.65 Czechia = 906.41 Poland = 676.27 Romania = 930.47

Source: IPPHEAE survey data

\*\*Statistically significant result

**Table 11** Post hoc pairwise comparison of students' perceptions of policy implementation

Dunn's multiple comparison test	Penalties for plagiarism administered according to a standard formula	I believe that all teachers follow the same procedures for similar cases of plagiarism	I believe that the way teachers treat plagiarism does not vary from student to student	I believe that when dealing with plagiarism teachers follow the existing procedures
UK vs Czechia	**	**	**	**
UK vs Poland	**	**	**	**
UK vs Romania	**	**	*	**
Czechia vs Poland	**	ns	ns	**
Czechia vs Romania	ns	*	**	ns
Poland vs Romania	*	**	**	**

*ns* Indicates no statistically significant difference

\* Statistically significant difference ( $p < .05$ )

\*\* Statistically significant difference ( $p < .001$ )

The study found a significant difference between the UK and all three Eastern European countries ( $p < .001$ ), for awareness of plagiarism/academic dishonesty policy and procedures and their availability. Given the lower power distance in the UK (35) as compared to Eastern Europe (57–90) we had hypothesised that students in the UK would perceive greater access to plagiarism policy and procedures in institutions that are characterised by flatter organisational structures and more direct lines of communication, and this hypothesis was confirmed. We found that students in the UK had the highest levels of awareness of plagiarism/academic dishonesty policy (83–93%) while less than half of the students in Poland and Romania (40–47%) were aware of the policy. A greater proportion of students in Eastern Europe were 'aware' of the policy than those who perceived it was 'available'. For example, less than a quarter (24%) of the students in Poland agreed that the plagiarism policy was available to them, though 40–43% were aware of the policy. These results may reflect the hierarchical nature of societies in Eastern Europe and the arguably fewer opportunities for students in those cultures to receive information openly and transparently. While we considered the three countries in Eastern Europe as having a shared history and similarity in national culture in comparison with the UK, our findings suggest that there is variation among student perceptions in the nations in Eastern Europe. Czechia had a significantly higher level ( $p < .001$ ) of awareness as compared to Poland and Romania. This may be due to the lower power distance in Czechia as compared to the other two nations in Eastern Europe. We found that students in cultures with lower power distance perceived higher levels of access.

One measure of access – students' awareness of the penalties applied for plagiarism and academic dishonesty – did not reflect the relative power distance scores between nations. The highest proportion (70%) of students in Czechia said that they were aware of penalties applied, whereas in the UK the proportion was lower (60%). Students in Poland were least aware (31%) of the penalties applied. Despite the lower power distance in the UK as compared to Czechia, it appears that institutional transparency regarding penalties is lacking. This issue is not unique to the UK as a Western nation, with a large proportion of students (37.5%) in an Australian study saying that 'they did not know if breaches of academic integrity were dealt with fairly at their university' (Bretag et al. 2014).

Students in the UK were significantly different ( $p < .001$ ) than all three Eastern European nations in terms of their perceptions of the adequacy of support: receiving training; wanting more training on avoidance of plagiarism and academic dishonesty; and understanding the link between copyright, intellectual property rights and plagiarism. Given the higher scores for individualism in the UK (89) as compared to Eastern Europe (30–58) we had hypothesised that students in the UK would be more likely to perceive that they have adequate support to avoid plagiarism, and this hypothesis was confirmed. The majority of students in the UK (77%) as compared to a minority (15–40%) in Eastern European nations, agreed that they had received training in techniques for scholarly academic writing and avoiding plagiarism.

Romania had the lowest national score for individualism and we anticipated that this would mean that students would rely more on the institution to provide support. The findings confirmed this assumption, with the highest proportion of students in Romania (86%) saying that they would like more training to avoid plagiarism. In addition to lower levels of individualism, perhaps the need for more training by students in Romania could be attributed to the higher levels of perceived corruption in Romania, and the associated day to day practices which, without training and modelling of appropriate practice, may continue to be perpetuated (see Glendinning et al. 2013, 2018). Paradoxically, a high proportion of students in Romania (80%) said they understood the link between copyright, intellectual property rights and plagiarism. This anomaly is not unique to Romania. Results from an Australian study found that a high proportion of students (92%) were confident that they could avoid an academic integrity breach, although a much lower proportion (64%) were aware of the academic integrity policy at their university and knew how to access it. This may reflect ‘false confidence’ (in both cultural settings) due to confusion in students’ minds about academic integrity policy and what constitutes an academic integrity breach.

Given the higher levels of uncertainty avoidance in Eastern Europe (74–93) as compared to the UK (35), we had hypothesised that students in Eastern Europe would be more likely to perceive that there is consistent implementation of plagiarism policy. However, this hypothesis was *not* confirmed. The UK had the highest levels of agreement by students that policy was being implemented consistently. Significant differences were also found between the three Eastern European countries. We had anticipated that students in Poland, the country with the highest uncertainty avoidance score, would perceive higher levels of consistency in the application of plagiarism policy in that they would expect teachers to ‘follow the rules’. On the contrary, students in Poland had the lowest level of agreement amongst all four countries in relation to consistency in the implementation of plagiarism policy.

In addition to national culture, there are numerous other factors which may influence students’ perceptions of plagiarism/academic integrity policy including personal motivation, institutional environment and external pressures. Earlier research by Lupton, Chapman and Weiss (2000, p. 324) found that Polish students believed that instructors should be responsible for creating an environment, which reduces opportunities for students to cheat. This would include creating innovative and original assessments, ensuring the vigilant proctoring of exams and maintaining strict classroom regulations (Lupton et al. 2000, p.235). Without these external controls, Polish students indicated that they might be more inclined to cheat.

External pressures in the higher education system in Poland have also led to a decline in standards and an institutional environment characterised by underfunding. Spending per academic in Poland is three times lower than in Czechia and four times lower than the average in the European Union (Kweik 2003, p. 468). Such a chronically underfunded system, coupled

with uncertain employment status, has resulted in many professors needing to be employed in multiple jobs, and this has negative implications for the quality of both teaching and research (Kweik 2003, p. 471). However, educators at all levels and across cultures, know that genuine engagement with assessment and pedagogy requires time, effort and commitment, and this is unlikely to occur in a professional context of underfunding and multiple positions across a range of employment environments, as is the case for Polish professors.

In this study, majority of students in Czechia and Romania agreed that teachers at their university followed existing procedures when dealing with plagiarism. This finding contrasts with research by Mungiu-Pippidi and Dusu (2011) who concluded that plagiarism in Romanian higher education goes unchecked at all levels, from undergraduates through to teachers and researchers and 'pro-integrity policies are difficult because of poor incentives for stakeholders to improve' (2011, p. 540). It may be that the small number of institutions ( $n = 4$ ) from Romania that chose to participate in the IPPHEAE study had an interest in tackling plagiarism whereas the study by Mungiu-Pippidi and Dusu (2011) reflected a much wider group of state universities in Romania.

The findings from the IPPHEAE project resonate with contemporary threats to academic integrity. Since the completion of the project in 2013, the pressures on all stakeholders in higher education have only increased, regardless of country or culture. The issues of insecure employment, multiple short-term contracts and lack of support for teaching is not unique to Eastern European nations but has become part of the fabric of higher education in the West, including the UK. Students, previously struggling with understanding how to locate and use sources according to academic conventions and thereby 'avoid plagiarism', are now bombarded by unscrupulous commercial cheat sites, offering to complete whole assignments for them (Bretag et al. 2018; Foltýnek and Králíková 2018; Newton and Lang 2016). Contract cheating now preoccupies regulators, administrators, policy-makers and instructors, right across the globe (ICAI 2016; QAA 2016, 2017; TEQSA 2015, 2017).

There are some limitations of this study which require consideration when interpreting the findings. Our study focused on four European countries and may not be generalisable to other countries. Hofstede's cultural dimensions were originally based on work-related values, while our survey data pertains to educational values and practices. The level of study of survey respondents varied between nations; the UK and Czechia had a higher proportion of Masters students, and the agreement level of Masters students was found to be significantly higher than Bachelors students across all countries. Finally, the number of universities participating in the study varied and therefore the national cultures with fewer universities reflect a narrower segment of the student population.

## Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between national culture and students' perceptions of plagiarism policy. We found significant differences between the UK and three Eastern European nations (Czechia, Poland and Romania) regarding students' perceptions of access to policy, adequacy of support and detail for consistent implementation. The exception was awareness of the penalties applied to students where the only significant difference was between the UK and Poland. Students in the UK reported the most positive perceptions in relation to plagiarism policy and procedures at their university, with students in Poland reporting the least positive perceptions. Considered through the lens of Hofstede's cultural

dimensions, our study found that students perceive greater access to plagiarism policy in cultures with low power distance and more adequacy of support in cultures with high individualism.

Our findings suggest that higher education policy-makers and managers need to consider the national cultural context when developing plagiarism policy and processes. This is especially important given the extensive research on plagiarism and academic integrity in Western cultures such as the UK, USA, Canada and Australia and the comparatively meagre research on these topics in Eastern Europe. While policy-makers in Eastern Europe are well advised to engage with the existing literature, this paper has underlined the limits of transferability of culturally-bound policies and practices. Much more research needs to occur within specific cultural contexts to ensure that policies and processes are fit for purpose. If universities are to adopt a whole-of-institution, holistic approach to promoting academic integrity, understanding and responding to what happens in 'our own background' is the critical first step.

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